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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3508
INFO RUEHBE/AMEMBASSY BELIZE 1316
RUEHWN/AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN 5484
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN 3583
RUEHKG/AMEMBASSY KINGSTON 8428
RUEHPU/AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE 3440
RUEHSP/AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN 4598
RUEHDG/AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO 2714
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0321

S E C R E T NASSAU 001706

SIPDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (CLASSIFIED BY)

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CAR RCBUDDEN, WHA/CCA, AND INR/IAA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/06/2016

TAGS: PREL PINR CU BF

SUBJECT: CUBAN PROPAGANDA AND THE BAHAMIAN FRIENDS OF THE CUBAN FIVE

Classified by: Deputy Chief of Mission D. Brent Hardt
Reasons: 1.5 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S/NF) SUMMARY: The Bahamian Friends of the Cuban Five -- a small group of leftist Bahamians with pro-Cuban sympathies -- has recently organized pro-Castro rallies and supported anti-U.S. propaganda in The Bahamas. The group, which is aided by the Cuban embassy in Nassau, has described Cuban intelligence operations in the U.S. as anti-terrorism investigations and has used the case of five convicted Cuban spies in Florida to call into question the U.S. human rights record and the war on terrorism. The group has gained little traction with the Bahamian public and spurred a strong defense of U.S. policy by the largest local daily paper. However, group members include some regular media contributors and have some local influence. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Earlier this year a group of fifteen Bahamians announced from the steps of the Cuban Embassy in Nassau the formation of "Bahamian Friends of the Cuban Five" -- a group whose stated purpose was to espouse the cause of five Cubans held in the United States on espionage charges. Calling itself a human rights group, the "Friends" criticized the U.S. for its detention of "anti-terrorist activists" and "five heroes of the empire," promising a series of activities to highlight their concerns. The Bahamian Friends include Errington Watkins, Alexander Morley, Lionel Carey, Tamiko Gilbert and Felix Bethel -- all well known local media commentators, academics or leftist activists with long-standing Cuban sympathies.

¶3. (U) The "Cuban Five," jailed in 1998 for espionage activities involving plans to infiltrate U.S. military sites in Florida as part of the "Wasp Network," were convicted in 2001 and have subsequently launched a series of judicial appeals in U.S. courts. At several events in Nassau in September and October, including a rally held at the College of The Bahamas featuring the wife of one of the Cuban Five, the Friends called the espionage work of the Cuban Five an "anti-terrorism investigation" and said that the investigators heroically turned over evidence of terrorist plots to the U.S. government. Rather than act on terrorism, said the Friends of the Five, the United States imprisoned the investigators. The Friends also highlighted perceived problems in the arrest and trial process of the Cuban spies, focusing on the inability of a pro-Castro Cuban to receive a

fair trial in Florida. The events received significant press coverage and attracted the interest of local human rights advocates.

¶4. (U) On October 10, the Bahamian Friends personally delivered to Post a letter accusing the United States of carrying out thousands of terrorist actions against Cuba, delivery of weapons and explosives into Cuba, multiple bioterror attacks, the murder of thousands of citizens, the burning of factories and plantations and the high-jackings of boats and planes. The letter repeated the Friends' claim that the imprisoned espionage agents were anti-terrorist investigators, and pronounced their support "for the right of every citizen . . . to be loyal to his country and defend it at all cost, barring that of taking innocent life." The letter accused the US of selectively fighting terrorism and requested the release of the spies.

¶5. (C) In response, the largest circulation Bahamian newspaper, The Tribune, backgrounded by mission, published a series of editorials defending U.S. policy and condemning the espionage activities of the Cuban five. One called on the "Friends of the Cuban Five" to focus their energies on real human rights abuses against dissidents in Havana, while others set forth facts from the trials of the five, including the sordid history of the "Wasp Network" and the due process protections afforded them in the U.S. The positive local response generated by the Tribune editorials created a backlash against the Friends, leading them to release a statement denying they were anti-American.

¶6. (S/NF) COMMENT: The "Friends of the Cuban Five" have gained little traction with the Bahamian public. The Bahamian government has steered clear of the group with elections approaching and the public still divided over the wisdom of the decision to open a Bahamian embassy in Cuba earlier this year. Though the group is not reflective of the views of the Bahamian government or public, the pro-Castro, anti-American group remains organized and active -- with

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Cuban Embassy support -- and is likely to continue its active public defense of Cuban espionage activities while acting as a local mouthpiece for Cuban propaganda to the Bahamian public. END COMMENT.

ROOD